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MYSTERY SHIPS

By the Same Author

TALES OF THE MERMAID TAVERN.

DRAKE.

THE FOREST OF WILD THYME.

COLLECTED POEMS (2 vols).

MYSTERY SHIPS

(TRAPPING THE "U" BOAT)

BY

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I. THE TRAPS

I

THE TRAPS

THERE is a tale in Devonshire that Sir Francis Drake has not only listened for his drum during the last three hundred years, but has also heard and answered it on more than one naval occasion. It was heard, as the men of the Brixham trawlers can testify, about a hundred years ago, when a little man, under the pseudonym of Nelson (for all Devonshire knows that Nelson was a reincarnation of Sir Francis) went sailing by to Trafalgar.

> Ask of the Devonshire men,
> For they heard, in the dead of night,
> The roll of a drum, and they saw *him* pass,
> On a ship all shining white.

He stretched out his dead cold face,
And he sailed in the grand old way.
The fishes had taken an eye and an arm;
But he swept Trafalgar's bay!

It was only a little before the great naval action in the North Sea—perhaps the greatest British victory since Trafalgar—that word came from the Brixham trawlers again. They had "heard Drake's drum beat," and were now assured that the ghost of Sir Francis Drake was inhabiting the body of Sir John Jellicoe.

There is good reason why the trawlers should be aware of this first; for it is among the three thousand odd trawlers, drifters, and other fishing craft of the British auxiliary fleet that the seamen who broke the Armada would find themselves most at home to-day. In this host

of auxiliaries Great Britain has, in fact, brought to life again and organised on a huge scale, with certain modern improvements, the men and the fleets of Drake and Hawkins; and it is these fleets and these men that have struck terror into the German submarines.

There has been some discussion in America as to whether Mr. Wilson's Notes, or some other more secret and certain power, caused the Germans to restrict the use of their deadliest sea-weapon. Inasmuch as this weapon ceased to trouble the British a little earlier than it ceased to sink neutrals, the latter alternative might be accepted as probable, even without further knowledge, but further knowledge absolutely confirms this probability.

Nothing is more striking in the conduct

of this war than the way in which the British method of "slow and sure" has justified itself. The superficial clamour for sudden and sensational proofs of "what Great Britain is doing" began in the first fortnight of the war. Neutral countries even wondered why the first month of the war had produced no great historian. In the meantime, Great Britain was making the history of the next thousand years; and that can only be done on vast and deeply sunken foundations, which must be laid in silence.

It was done in silence, and silence was one of the weapons. Submarines went out and never returned. Other submarines went out, perplexed, against a mystery; and these, too, never returned, or returned in mysteriously

diminishing numbers, and then neutrals began to inquire, with a new note of curiosity, "What is England doing?"

We heard tales of steel nets—as vague as the results would have been but for certain great preliminaries, of which we never heard. To begin with, a body of men, many thousands in number, was chosen from the longshore fishermen and trawler crews. They were gradually drilled, disciplined, and trained, and put into naval uniform. This force is now almost as large as the regular Army of the United States. The men were chosen, of course, on an entirely different principle from that of the Army. They were tough sea-dogs, of all ages, inured to all the ways of the sea, but not at all to any form of discipline. This in itself implies

very great preliminaries, for the finished product is fit to man a battleship.

In the meantime their fishing boats, trawlers, drifters and whalers were gradually taken over by the Government and fitted out for the hunt, some 3,000 of them. To these were added a fleet of fast motor-boats, specially built for scouting purposes. They were stationed at various points all round the island.

From one of their bases a patrol-boat took me out along one of the longest lines of the flotilla. This innocent line of trawlers, strung out for some fifty miles, had more nightmares in store for the German submarine than a fleet of battleships. It was an odd sensation to approach trawler after trawler and note the one obviously unusual feature

of each—the menacing black gun at bow and stern. They were good guns, too—English, French, and Japanese. The patrol-boat carried a Hotchkiss, and most of the trawlers had equally efficient weapons.

There were other unusual features in every trawler, drifter, and whaler—features that made one catch one's breath when their significance was realised. About this I may say very little.

A submarine may enter their seas, indeed, and even go to America. She may even do some damage within their lines. But, if she does this, her position is known and, if there be any future damage done, it will probably have to be done by another submarine; for she has

called upon a thousand perils, from every point of the compass, to close upon her return journey. I have actually seen the course of a German submarine—which thought itself undiscovered—marked from day to day on the chart at a British base. The clues to all the ramifications of this work are held by a few men at the Admiralty in London.

We boarded one of the trawlers just as her nets were running out, and at the end of twenty minutes, when the long-dwindling line of fishing craft had "dressed" itself, all that was necessary was to wait for visitors. As for their welcome, one officer remarked to me cheerfully, "I don't know about the others, but I've bagged 'some.'"

Throughout this work of the auxiliary fleet it is worth noting, that in their records of rescue and salvage, a good half of their care is devoted to the ships of neutrals. It is Britain that sweeps the sea for mines, marks them off on her charts, warns, delays, and guides the traffic of the world through a thousand unknown perils. And Britain has paid the price for it; for, while the neutral traffic is held up for an hour or two, at the lifting of a policeman's hand, the mines are removed; but sometimes those who remove them are awaited in vain by their homes in the little sea-ports. That neutrals are not altogether forgetful of the fact is shown by the exceedingly generous subscriptions raised on the Atlantic liners, among Americans

and others, for the widows and orphans of the patrols and mine-sweepers. On one Dutch liner recently, over a thousand dollars was contributed for this purpose, in half an hour, by the passengers at breakfast, who had come undisturbed through waters full of menace.

But neutrals have not always escaped: and, in talking to the men on these trawlers, I was struck by the fact that a large proportion of their tales referred—as I have said above—to the salvage or the actual saving of neutral ships.

Often, as in the case of the *Falaba*, the rescue work is attended with many perils to the auxiliary concerned. From the *Falaba* one hundred and sixteen persons were rescued, and the drifter was "bilged," a phrase that, in this case,

meant "almost foundered." On a few occasions the hunters have themselves been trapped. Three men, taken off a trawler by a submarine, endured an eighty hours' nightmare under the sea that shattered the mind of one and left permanent traces on the other two. Periodically revolvers were put to their heads, and they were ordered, on pain of death, to tell all they knew of our naval dispositions. They saw a good deal of the internal routine of the German submarine also, and noted, characteristically, that the German crew—on this boat, at any rate—were very "jumpy," too "jumpy" even to take a square meal. They munched biscuits at their stations at odd moments.

On the third morning they heard guns

going overhead, and watched the Germans handing out shells to their own guns. Finally, a torpedo was fired, and they heard it take effect. Then they emerged into the red wash of dawn and saw only the floating wreckage of the big ship that had been sunk; and, amongst the wreckage, a small boat. They were bundled into this; told they were free to row to England or Nineveh; and the submarine left them — three longshore fishermen who had passed through the latest invention of the modern scientific devil, two who could still pull at the oars, but the other too crazy to steer, as his little personal part of the price paid by Britain for sweeping and patrolling the seas of civilisation.

Many were the tales of neutrals, towed

to port, battered but safe, by these indefatigable auxiliaries. One was towed in upside down, by fixing an English anchor in one of her German-made shell holes; she was towed for a hundred miles, at a quarter of a knot an hour, and arrived for the Admiral at the base to make his inspection. But, even with neutrals, the auxiliary fleet finds it necessary sometimes to add the wisdom of the serpent to its general philanthropy. On one occasion a neutral tank steamer was overhauled. She was believed to be carrying suspiciously large supplies to a suspiciously vague destination, but was allowed to proceed in the name of the freedom of the seas. Nevertheless, with innocent fishing-boats dotting our waters at intervals of half a mile, and wireless

telegraphy to help them, the sea has almost as many eyes and ears to-day as it has fishes; and at dusk a drifter rolled up to our neutral friend again.

"Begorra, it's twins!" said the gunner, training his twelve-pounder on to her; and twins it was. For, tucked close under either quarter, lay a German submarine, quietly being fed.

The skipper of another trawler that we boarded was a quiet-voiced man, with eyes that looked into the distance. There were suppressed tears in them, very sternly suppressed, as he told me that his brother had been killed, with all hands, on the mine-sweeper next to his own, only a few weeks ago. He also told me—and I wished that Americans could have heard him—of the German

attack upon the American ship, the *Gulflight*, which he had seen from his own fishing-boat. The German submarine was half-way between himself and the *Gulflight*, which was flying the American flag, and could be recognised at four times the distance. The evidence of this man and his crew had never been asked or taken, but he gave me one significant piece of it—the fur cap of one of the lost American seamen, which he had picked up.

No men were ever more clearly entitled to go on their ways unmolested than the crew of this all-American merchant ship. There was no mistake possible, no excuse, and no ground for pardon in that one anarchistic act of the German navy.

The attack on the American steamship

Gulflight was narrated to me as follows by the skipper of His Majesty's drifter *Contrive*:

"At the time of the incident I was serving as the skipper of a vessel fishing out of Lowestoft. We were lying to our nets about nine miles off the Scillies. In fact, we could see the Scillies, as it was a very clear day, with a blue sky and a fresh breeze. Many vessels had passed us during the day, and the sea was all so quiet that you might imagine we were still at peace with everyone, and that things like submarines and mines never existed. Of course, I knew better, and I had good reason to remember the day the German fleet came to bombard my native home. They weren't allowed to remain over long, as they were chased

back to port, but they stayed long enough to sow a large minefield in the way of the shipping. My brother was then a naval skipper in charge of His Majesty's drifter *Will and Maggie*. He met his death trying to sweep up those mines, and his ship and his crew went with him.

"I'd seen their submarines before, although when I did see them they were too busy trying to evade our patrols to try to sink my little ship. You must remember that I was then engaged in fishing, and could only rely on my stout stem to attack one. One night, just about sunset, I saw one. She passed quite close to us—not more than a mile and a half, I should say. She was a great big chap, with two guns, and a lot of the

crew on deck—that was about sixty miles from the Seven Stones Lightship.

"Well, to continue. My vessel, funnily enough, was called *Our Friend*, and, before the end of the day, it was our luck to prove our friendship for our friends across the water. As I was saying, we had shot our nets, and about noon we saw a large tank steamer coming up Channel at a good pace. She was coming in our direction, and I soon saw her colours, the Stars and Stripes, at the stern—a fine, big ensign it was, and spread out like a board. When she was about two miles off, to my horror I saw a submarine emerge from the depths and come right to the surface.

"There was no sign of life on the submarine, but she lay stationary, rising

and falling in the trough, and I knew instinctively that she was watching the steamer. She had undoubtedly come from the same direction as that in which the steamer was going, and it did not take me long to realise what had actually happened. I took in the situation at a glance. The submarine had passed the *Gulflight* (for that proved to be her name). She had deliberately increased speed to lie in wait for her and get a sure target, rather than attempt to fire a torpedo when overhauling her, with the possible chance of missing, and wasting one of those expensive weapons even on an American.

"The submarine was painted light grey, and had two guns; but I could not see any number. For five minutes

she lay motionless—and then, having fixed the position of her prey, and taken her speed into consideration, she slowly submerged in its direction. I knew what was coming, and it came—a dull, heavy explosion and a silence, and then, as if to see the result of her handiwork, the submarine again appeared. She did not stay up long, for smoke was soon seen on the horizon, and I knew the patrols had been looking for her. She knew it, too—and submerged. I hauled in my nets, and proceeded at full speed to the sinking ship, to try and save the lives of the crew. Our boat was launched, and I went aboard. By this time the *Gulflight's* bows were well down and her foredecks awash, and she looked as if she would sink at any minute. She was

badly holed in her fore part. The Huns, I thought, had done their work well.

"Ten minutes later I saw the patrol vessels racing up for all they were worth, and one of these vessels took off the crew, two of whom were drowned. The captain of the *Gulflight* died of shock. Soon four patrol vessels were on the spot, and three of these vessels put men aboard with wires in double quick time. The fourth—a big trawler with wireless (which I now know in naval language as a 'Trawler Leader')—steamed round and round in the vicinity, keeping a careful watch. In less than two hours the *Gulflight*, her Stars and Stripes still flying above water, was being towed at a good speed to port, with the trawlers in attendance. That is all I have to tell;

yet my story is perfectly true in every detail.

"Later on I went to Penzance, and found that the crew of the *Gulflight* were receiving every comfort and hospitality from the senior naval officer, and were greatly pleased with themselves."

CAP'N STORM-ALONG.

They are buffeting out in the bitter grey weather,
—*Blow the man down, bullies, blow the man down!*—
Sea-lark singing to *Golden Feather*,
And burly blue waters all swelling aroun'.
There's *Thunderstone* butting ahead as they wallow,
With death in the mesh of their deep-sea trawl;
There's *Night-Hawk* swooping by wild *Sea-swallow*;
And old Cap'n Storm-along leading 'em all.

Bashing the seas to a welter of white,
Look at the fleet that he leads to the fight.
O, they're dancing like witches to open the ball;
And old Cap'n Storm-along's lord of 'em all.

Now, where have you seen such a bully old sailor?
His eyes are as blue as the scarf at his throat;
And he rolls on the bridge of his broad-beamed whaler,
In yellow sou'-wester and oil-skin coat.
In trawler and drifter, in dinghy and dory,
Wherever he signals, they leap to his call;
They batter the seas to a lather of glory,
With old Cap'n Storm-along leading 'em all.

You'll find he's from Devon, the sailor I mean;
Look at his whaler now, shipping it green.
O, Fritz and his "U" boat must crab it and crawl
When old Cap'n Storm-along sails to the ball.

Ay, there is the skipper that knows how to scare 'em
—*Blow the man down, bullies, blow the man down!*—
Look at the sea-wives he keeps in his harem,
Wicked young merry-maids, buxom and brown:
There's *Rosalind*, the sea-witch, and *Gipsy* so lissom,
All dancing like ducks in the teeth of the squall,
With a bright eye for Huns, and a Hotchkiss to kiss 'em;
For old Cap'n Storm-along's lord of 'em all.

Look at him, battering darkness to light!
Look at the fleet that he leads to the fight!
O, hearts that are mighty, in ships that are small,
Your old Cap'n Storm-along's king of us all.

II. THE UNDER-SEA PIRATES

II

THE UNDER-SEA PIRATES

It might be supposed that the activities described above would cover all the operations of the auxiliary fleet. But the extension of their indomitable little lines is one of the most romantic tales in the history of naval warfare. For many months flocks of sea-gulls had screamed over a certain strip of coast in North Africa. It was littered and strewn with wreckage and dead bodies from merchant ships, allies and neutrals, who had met the German submarines. A small flotilla of yachts, trawlers and drifters was despatched to these waters, and to-day that coast is as clean as any of our own. The value

of these patrols in the Mediterranean has been grimly proved. For on one occasion, when their numbers were smaller, a trawler squadron was withdrawn from the mouth of the Adriatic to deal with unexpected trouble in the Ægean. Promptly there were submarines out through the unguarded gates, and more wreckage and dead on the unwatched shores. There are British longshore fishermen in the White Sea patrolling or frozen in, and others are even patrolling the coast of Bulgaria. One of these tarry old skippers found that something had gone wrong with his trawler's engines. In true Elizabethan style, he got into his dinghy, with two men and three rifles, and sent his disabled trawler, wallowing and floundering behind a tug,

back to the base. "But where is your skipper?' asked the naval officer of the returned seamen.

"'E's in the dinghy, sir, blockading the Bulgers," was the reply.

They take very simple views of Armageddon, some of these trawler skippers, and some excuse for this epic simplicity and largeness has been given to them by the Germans. For when a trawler is sunk to-day it is usually reported from Berlin as a guard-ship or "an English warship." Why, then, may not a Scotch skipper regard his dinghy as a worthy successor, at least, to the old *Victory*? Nothing is more baffling indeed to the philosophy of "frightfulness" than the fact that, in the long run, desperate remedies are always found for its most

desperate manifestations. The sinking of unarmed fishing-boats was one of the favourite amusements of the "U" boat in the earlier stages of the war. A typical yarn was told me as we entered the waters where it happened.

It was on a fine summer morning that the fishing-trawler *Victoria* left a certain port beloved of Nelson, to fish on the Labadie Bank. She carried a crew of nine men, together with a little boy named Jones—a friend of the skipper. There is a well-thumbed copy of *Treasure Island*, beloved of all the youngsters of that district, in the local library. Perhaps it was this book that had inspired him to the adventure, for, though nobody quite believed, at that time, in the existence of the Twentieth Century pirate, there

was adventure in the air, and it was only after much pleading that he was allowed to go. This vessel, of course, was unarmed and used only for fishing. For a week all went well. There was a good catch of fish, splashing the rusty-red craft with shining scales from bow to stern, and piling up below like mounded silver. The crew were beginning to think of their women at home and their accustomed nooks in the Lord Nelson and Blue Dolphin taverns.

They were about a hundred and thirty miles from land when the sound of a gun was heard by all hands. The boy Jones ran up to the bridge, where he stood by the skipper. In the distance, against the sunset, they saw the silhouette of a strange-looking ship. At

first it looked like a drifter, painted grey with mizzen set. But the flash of another gun revealed it as a submarine. The skipper hesitated. Should he stop the ship, trusting to the laws of war and the good faith of the enemy? The lives of the crew and the little boy, who had been left in his charge, were his first thought. Yes, he would do so, and the order was given. The engines ceased to throb. Then, as the ship rolled idly, he was disillusioned. The gun flashed again, and he knew that he was facing an implacable determination to sink and destroy.

It was only a forlorn hope, but he would risk it, and not a man demurred at his decision. The engines rang "full speed ahead," and the *Victoria* began to tear through the green water, for home.

The submarine opened a rapid fire from two powerful guns, and the first to fall was the little lad Jones. The skipper kept steadily on his course, with the boy dead at his feet. But the submarine gained rapidly and continued to pour a devastating fire on the helpless craft. The skipper was struck next and blown to pieces. The bridge was a mass of bloody wreckage and torn flesh. The next shell shattered the tiny engine-room and killed the engine-man. The *Victoria* lay at the mercy of the enemy. The submarine continued to close on her, and kept up a rapid fire, killing the mate and another engine-man, and severely wounding another. The four men who were left tried to save themselves. The boat had been smashed to splinters

and they jumped into the water with planks.

Careless of the men in the water, the submarine steamed up alongside the *Victoria* and sealed her fate by placing bombs aboard her. There was a violent explosion, and her wreckage, strewn over the face of the waters, far and near, was the only visible relic of her existence. Not till nearly two hours after this were the four numbed and helpless men in the water taken aboard the submarine. They were placed down below, and, one by one, closely examined by the commander as to the system of patrols in the neighbourhood. Dazed as they were, and hardly responsible for their actions, they one and all refused to answer their captors. Late that night they were told

that the submarine was about to submerge, and, so far as they could gather, they proceeded below the surface for over twelve hours. They knew enough to realise that they were in constant danger of being trapped in the belly of the sea and drowned, hideously, in the darkness, but not a man spoke. During the night they were given some coffee and a biscuit each, and the wound of one man, who had been badly lacerated by a shell, was dressed by the ship's surgeon. They lay in the semi-darkness, listening to the steady beat and hum of the engines, and wondering what kind of a miracle could bring them to the light of day again.

On the next morning the trawler *Hirose* fell a victim to the same submarine. She was no sooner sighted than she was

greeted with a hail of shot. She stopped and lowered a boat, while the enemy dashed up. The commander of the submarine shouted through a megaphone: "Leave your ship. I give you five minutes." The crew complied — there were ten hands all told—and were ordered aboard the submarine, while the *Hirose* was blown up. After being given six biscuits each, the crew of the *Hirose* were put back in their boat. The survivors of the *Victoria* were ordered on deck and placed in the same boat. The submarine steamed away and shortly afterwards dipped.

It was very dirty weather at this time. There were fourteen men crowded in a small trawler boat, a hundred miles from home. A strong gale blew and the rain drenched them. By dint of baling

out the water continually, till their arms were numbed, they managed to keep afloat. Twenty-four hours later, at six o'clock in the morning, they were picked up by the collier *Ballater* about sixty miles off the Smalls Lighthouse. Their condition was then indescribable. Soaked through and through, with the boat half full of water, battered to and fro by every wave, they had lost all hope, and were lying exhausted. Their bodies were stiff with cramp, and they were hauled on board the *Ballater* with difficulty.

But there, at least, they found the rough comfort of the sea. Each man was stripped and his clothes dried in the engine-room. Hot coffee and food and blankets kept them alive till they reached port.

But the ordeal had left its mark upon them all; and when examined as to his experiences on board the submarine, the boatswain of the *Victoria*—a man of over sixty years—seemed to be too dazed to give any coherent reply. All that he could remember was the scene on the deck of the *Victoria* before the crew took to the sea; and his description was that of a shambles, where six of his mates lay drenched with blood, some with their heads blown off, others screaming in agony with arms and legs blown off; and, in a chaos of escaping steam and wreckage, the little boy Jones lying dead on the bridge.

NAME-SAKES.

But where's the brown drifter that went out alone?
—Roll and go, and fare you well—
"Was her name *Peggy Nutten?*" That name is my own.
Fare you well, my sailor.
They sang in the dark, "Let her go! Let her go!"
And she sailed to the West, where the broad waters flow;
And the others come back, but . . . the bitter winds blow.
Ah, fare you well, my sailor.

The women, at evening, they wave and they cheer.
—Roll and go, and fare you well—
They're waiting to welcome their lads at the pier.
Fare you well, my sailor.
They're all coming home in the twilight below;
But there's one little boat . . . Let her go! Let her go!
She carried my heart, and a heart for the foe.
Ah, fare you well, my sailor.

The *Nell* and the *Maggie*, the *Ruth* and the *Joan*,
—Roll and go, and fare you well—
They come to their name-sakes, and leave me alone.
Fare you well, my sailor.
And names are kep' dark, for the spies mustn't know;
But they'll look in my face, an' I think it will show;
Peggy Nutten's my name. Let her go! Let her go!
Ah, fare you well, my sailor.

III. KILMENY

III

KILMENY

THE classes of the auxiliaries were chartered in an order befitting a democratic age. First, a number of private yachts were taken over and transfigured. Their white and gold were washed over with service grey, and their luxurious trappings adapted to the grim work before them. His Majesty's yachts are now distinguished chiefly by their graceful lines and their leaning towards classical names. It is a Homeric tale, and the names are not negligible. But *Atalanta* no longer runs before the wind with a breast of snow; and it is many a day since *Bacchante* lifted the golden light of her wine-cups

over the dancing Channel waters. To rougher nights the *Bacchante* is dedicated now; to rougher nights and coarser drinks —even to rum, I think, on certain lawful occasions. *Sabrina*, too, is listening for a terrible song where she sits under the south coast of Ireland; and as for *Iris*, the old foam-bows flash around her course; but her wings have lost the radiance of their prime. A deadlier message is hers than the glory of colour, and right well she carries it. *Narcissus* looks into darker waters, but not for the drowning light of his own eyes. It was *Narcissus* that was once told off, with a few others, to escort a liner. The great ship went by like a moving city, and had left *Narcissus* foaming hopelessly in her wake. But he put on full speed and

followed as best he could. It was well that he did so; for a submarine suddenly appeared, lying in wait for the liner; and the *Narcissus*, though thousands of yards astern at this time, opened fire with such effect that the "U" boat, surpassing Echo, submerged and left not even a voice behind her.

To-day the best of these yachts act as flagships to the vast fleet of trawlers, drifters and whalers. These last three classes were taken in the order given: at first from the British Isles, and afterwards, in the case of the whalers, from dominions remote as Newfoundland. The men, too, have latterly been recruited from the farthest shores of the British Empire. These fishing auxiliaries may almost be described as the people's fleet;

and their names are like stray bars of folk-song. We talk to-day as if Poetry were dead in the heart of the British people, or as if she were a dusty denizen of libraries; but here, indeed, her wings go beating out to sea. Who are the secret minstrels that touch their craft with so subtle a sense of all the lights and shadows of their calling—*Fleet Wing*, *Thunderstone*, *Ocean Searcher* and *Pilot Star*? All the sad earnestness of a thrifty folk whose shawl-clad women look at daybreak, from beaches littered with broken spars, across the grey tumbling wastes of sea, and look so often in vain, are concentrated into a few phrases on the bows of these boats—*Faithful*, *Gleam of Hope*, *Breadwinner* and *Kindly Light*. A few are more directly fledged—*Sea-Lark* and *Albatross*,

Night-Hawk and *Storm-cock*. Others have apparently followed that mysterious law by which certain creatures assume the chaotic tints of their environment and make them organic—so that the herring gull has a body of foam, mottled with brown sand; and the mackerel repeats the blue and green of the waves in a vital form. These are the craft that have simply christened their bows in the broken colours of the sea—*Surf* and *Sapphire*, *Amethyst* and *Silvery Dawn*. Others recall a thousand memories. But who are the unknown treasurers of the dreams of old England that have named these? *Robin Hood* calls to the *Dusty Miller*, and both sail out together, to cudgel and smash the revivalists of an ancient cruelty. Nothing

could be more remote from the glittering evil which they fight than these gentle old companions—*The Young Nun* and *Marian*, *Primrose* and *Barbara Cowie*, *Blue Bell* and *Busy Bee*, *Comely Bank* and *Christmas Daisy*. I saw them all go out to sea at sunset; and it seemed that Britain was opening her great silent heart, and letting out her inmost thoughts, embodied in these little ships, to guard the sacred fire.

There were others of a more personal nature, telling of courtships in English lanes—*Rose and Oak*, where strength and beauty met and kindled; or, with a touch of the diminutive—the "little language" of lovers—*Girl Marjorie;* or perhaps of parental affection, so that cradle and drifter might rock together in dreams, though seas roared wide between them—*Boy Willie*.

Others were Biblical: *Susanna* and *Bath-sheba* were so named, I think, only for their prowess in the water; but *Ruth* had all the old clinging sorrow of those estranged by distance, not by lack of love. Chapel bells in lonely valleys, lost among inland fir-woods, called to *Ebenezer*; called also to *David and Jonathan*; and the names had more significance for the crews than would be supposed. The skipper of the *Mizpah* was asked if he attached any particular meaning to the name of his vessel, and he replied, simply and gravely, "It means, *May the Lord be between you and me when we are parted one from another.*"

There were many Scottish names, famous in ballad and song. I saw *Kilmeny* gliding through the dusk, like a ghost; and the

beat of our own engines, borrowing a golden bar from the Ettrick Shepherd, told me her tale anew :

Dark, dark lay the drifters against the red West
As they shot their long meshes of steel overside,
And the oily green waters were rocking to rest
When *Kilmeny* went out, at the turn of the tide;
And nobody knew where that lassie would roam,
For the magic that called her was tapping unseen,
It was well-nigh a week ere *Kilmeny* came home;
And nobody knew where Kilmeny had been.

With a gun at her bow that was Newcastle's best,
And a gun at her stern that was fresh from the Clyde;
And a secret her skipper had never confessed,
Not even at dawn, to his newly-wed bride;
And a wireless that whispered above, like a gnome,
The laughter of London, the boasts of Berlin;
O, it may have been mermaids that lured her from home;
But . . . nobody knew where Kilmeny had been.

It was dark when *Kilmeny* came home from her quest,
With a bridge dabbled red where her skipper had died,
But she moved like a bride with a rose at her breast,
And "Well done, *Kilmeny*," the Admiral cried.
Now, from sixty-four fathom a conger may come,
And tell you his tale of a drowned submarine;
But, late in the evening *Kilmeny*, came home;
And nobody knew where Kilmeny had been.

There's a wandering shadow that stares at the foam
(Though they sing all the night to old England, their queen)
Late, late in the evening, Kilmeny came home,
And nobody knew where Kilmeny had been.

IV. THE SCALP

IV

THE SCALP

It is difficult to convey in words the wide sweep and subtle co-ordination of this ocean hunting; for the beginning of any tale may be known only to an Admiral in a London Office, the middle of it only to a commander at Kirkwall, and the end of it only to a trawler skipper off the coast of Ireland. But here and there it is possible to piece the fragments together into a complete adventure, as in the following record of a successful chase, where the glorious facts outrun all the imaginations of the wildest melodrama.

There were two suspicious vessels at

anchor, one moonless night, in a small bay near the Mumbles. They lay there like shadows; but, before long, they knew that the night was alive, for a hundred miles, with silent talk about them. At dawn His Majesty's Trawlers *Golden Feather* and *Peggy Nutten* foamed up; but the shadows had disappeared.

The trawlers were ordered to search the coast thoroughly for any submarine stores that might have been left there. "Thoroughly," in this war, means a great deal. It means that even the bottom of the sea must be searched. This was done by grapnels; but the bottom was rocky and seemed unfit for a base. Nothing was found but a battered old lobster pot, crammed with sea-weed and little green crabs.

Probably these appearances were more than usually deceitful; for, shortly afterwards, watchers on the coast reported a strange fishing-boat, with patched brown sails, heading for the suspected bay. Before the patrols came up, however, she seemed to be alarmed. The brown sails were suddenly taken in, the disguised conning tower was revealed; and this innocent fishing boat, gracefully submerging, left only the smiling and spotless April seas to the bewildered eyes of the coastguard.

In the meantime, signals were pulsing and flashing, on land and sea; and the "U" boat had hardly dipped when, over the smooth green swell, a great sea-hawk came whirring up to join the hunt, a hawk with light yellow wings and a

body of service grey—the latest type of seaplane. It was one of those oily seas in which a watcher from the air may follow a submarine for miles, as an olive-green shadow under the lighter green. The "U" boat doubled twice; but it was half an hour before her sunken shadow was lost to sight under choppy blue waters; and long before that time, she was evidently at ease in her mind, and pursuing a steady course. For the moment her trail was then lost; and the hawk, having reported her course, dropped out of the tale.

The next morning, in the direction indicated by that report, several patrol boats heard the sound of gunfire and overhauled a steamer, which had been attacked by a submarine. They gave

chase by "starring" to all the points of the compass, but could not locate the enemy. A little later, however, another trawler observed the wash of a submarine crossing her stern about two hundred yards away. The trawler starboarded, got into the wake of the submarine, and tried to ram her at full speed. She failed to do this, as the "U" boat was at too great a depth. The enemy disappeared; and again the trawlers gathered and "starred."

In the meantime, certain nets had been shot, and, though the enclosed waters were very wide, it was quite certain that the submarine was contained within them. Some hours later, another trawler heard firing, and rushed towards the sound. About sunset, she sighted a submarine which was just dipping. The trawler

opened fire at once, without result. The light was very bad, and it was very difficult to trace the enemy; but the trawler continued the search, and, about midnight, she observed a small light close to the water. She steamed within a few yards of it and hailed, thinking it was a small boat. There was a considerable amount of wreckage about, which was afterwards proved to be the remnants of a patrol vessel sunk by the submarine. There was no reply to the hail, and the light instantly disappeared. For the third time the patrols gathered and "starred" from this new point.

And here the tale was taken up by a sailor who was in command of another trawler at the time. I give it, so far as possible, in his own words.

"About four o'clock in the morning, I was called by deck-hand William Brown to come on deck and see if an object sighted was a submarine.

"I did so, and saw a submarine about a mile distant on the port bow. I gave the order 'Hard-a-starboard.' The ship was turned until the gun was able to bear on the submarine; and it was kept bearing. At the same time I ordered hands to station; and, about ten minutes afterwards, I gave the order to fire. The submarine immediately altered course from W. to N.N.W., and went away from us very fast. I burned lights to attract the attention of the drifters; and we followed at our utmost speed, making about eight knots, and shipping light sprays. We fired another shot about

two minutes later; but it was breaking dawn, and we were unable to see the fall of the shots. After the second shot the submarine submerged, I hoisted warning signals, and, about half an hour later, I saw a large steamer turning round, distant between two or three miles on our starboard beam. I headed towards her, keeping the gun trained on her, as I expected—judging by her action—that she had smelt the submarine. When we were about a mile and a half from the steamer, I saw the submarine half a mile astern of her. We opened fire again, and gave her four shots, with about two minutes between 'em. The submarine then dodged behind the off quarter of the steamer."

He paused to light his pipe, and added,

quite gravely, "When she had disappeared behind the steamer I gave the order 'Cease fire,' to avoid hitting the larger vessel."

I made a mental note of his thoughtfulness; but, not for worlds would I have shown any doubt of his power to blast his way, if necessary, through all the wood and iron in the universe; and I was glad that the blue clouds of our smoke mingled for a moment between us.

"I saw two white boats, off the port quarter," he continued, "but I paid no attention to them. I ordered the helm to be starboarded a bit more, and told the gunner to train his gun on the bow of the steamer; for I expected the submarine to show there next. A few minutes later she did so, and, when

she drew ahead, I gave the order to fire. I should say we were about a mile and a quarter away. We gave him two more shots, and they dropped very close, as the spray rose over his conning tower. He altered his course directly away from us, and we continued to fire. The third shot smothered his conning tower with spray. I did not see the fourth and fifth shots pitch. There was no splash visible, although it was then broad daylight; so I believe they must have hit him. A few moments after this the submarine disappeared.

"I turned, then, towards the two white boats and hailed them. The chief officer of the steamer was in charge of one They were returning to their ship, and told me that we had hit the submarine. We

escorted them through the nets, and parted very good friends."

"But did you get the scalp of this 'U' boat?" I asked.

"We signalled to the Admiral, and he sent the *Daffy* to investigate. She found the place all right. It was a choppy sea; but there was one smooth patch in it, just where we told 'em the submarine had disappeared; a big patch of water like wavy satin, two or three hundred yards of it, coloured like the stripes on a mackerel, all blue and green with oil. They took a specimen of the oil."

"Did it satisfy the Admiralty?"

"No. Nothing satisfies the Admiralty but certainties. They count the minimum losses of the enemy, and the maximum

of their own. Very proper, too. Then you know where you are. But, mind you, I don't believe we finished him off that morning. Oil don't prove that. It only proves we hit him. I believe it was the *Maggie and Rose* that killed him or the *Hawthorn*. No; it wasn't either. It was the *Loch Awe*."

"How was that?"

"Well, as Commander White was telling you, we'd shot our nets to north and south of him. There were two or three hundred miles, perhaps, in which he might wriggle about; but he couldn't get out of the trap, even if he knew where to look for the danger. He tried to run for home; and that's what finished him. They'll tell you all about that on the *Loch Awe*."

So the next day I heard the end of

the yarn from a sandy-haired and blue-eyed skipper in a trawler whose old romantic name was dark with a new significance. He was terribly logical. In his cabin—a comfortable room with a big stove—he had a picture of his wife and daughters, all very rigid and uncomfortable. He also had three books. They included neither Burns nor Scott. One was the Bible, thumbed by his grandfather and his father, till the paper had worn yellow and thin at the sides. The second, I am sorry to say, was called *The Beautiful White Devil.* The third was an odd volume of Froude in the "Everyman" edition. It dealt with the Armada.

"I was towin' my nets wi' the rest o' my group," he said, "till aboot three

o'clock i' the mornin' on yon occasion. It was fine weather wi' a kind o' haar. All at once, my ship gaed six points aff her coorse, frae S.E. to E.N.E.; and I jaloused that the nets had been fouled by some muckle movin' body. I gave orders to pit the wheel hard a-port, but she wouldna answer. Suddenly, the strain on the nets stoppit.

"I needna tell you what had happened. Of coorse, it was preceesely what the Admiralty had arranged tae happen when gentlemen in Undersea boats try to cut their way through oor nets. Mind ye, thae nets are verra expensive."

SALT WATER.

The very best ship that ever I knew
—Ah-way O, to me O—
Was a big black trawler with a deep-sea crew—
Sing, my bullies, let the bullgine run.

There was one old devil with a broken nose
—Ah-way O, to me O—
He was four score years, as I suppose—
O sing, my bullies, let the bullgine run.

We was wrecked last March, in a Polar storm
—Ah-way O, to me O—
And we asked the old cripple if his feet was warm
Sing, my bullies, let the bullgine run.

And the old, old devil (he was ninety at the most)
—Ah-way O, to me O—
Roars," Ay, warm as a lickle piece of toast"—
So sing, my bullies, let the bullgine run.

" For I soaked my sea-boots and my dungarees
—Ah-way O, to me O—
In the blue salt water that the Lord don't freeze"—
Oh, sing, my bullies, let the bullgine run.

V. A CHRISTMAS DINNER

V

A CHRISTMAS DINNER

THE crews of the "auxiliaries" must indeed be seamen, for they must keep the seas in all weathers, in craft that, despite their sturdiness, move in rough weather like buck-jumping ponies. Let the great ships that go sailing by on Christmas Day remember the Christmas of the *Van Stirum*. This yarn also was told to me, in the waters where it happened, while the trawlers were shooting their deadly nets. On Christmas Day, 1915, the *Van Stirum*, a steamer of 1,990 tons net, on a voyage from Rouen to Liverpool, was nearing home. She was in ballast, unarmed, and carried a crew of

forty-six officers and men. A heavy south-west swell was running, but the weather was fine, and it was possible to see for a distance of at least eight miles. At about 1.35 p.m., without any warning, the *Van Stirum* was attacked by two German submarines. They were not observed until they had approached to within half a mile of the vessel. This may be due to the fact that they were painted curiously—black and white in horizontal stripes.

One submarine then opened fire. Three shots were fired in quick succession, but they all fell short. The *Van Stirum* immediately altered course, and at the same time sent out a distress call: "*Van Stirum* chased by two submarines, position critical, firing shots and gaining on

us." After the first attack the engine-room telegraphs were rung up to "full speed." The vessel increased from thirteen to fifteen knots, and very slowly drew ahead of her adversaries. The race, a very uneven one, was kept up for three-quarters of an hour, when the submarines, which later developed a speed on the surface of about eighteen knots, again opened fire. One shell struck the ship on the starboard quarter, and another brought down the wireless aerials. The latter, a lucky shot, cut the vessel entirely off from the outside world. Realising his helplessness, unable to observe any friendly patrol vessel, and knowing quite well that a few more shots would effectually stop his vessel, the master decided to abandon his ship. At 2.30 p.m.

preparations were made to leave. At 2.35 p.m. the vessel was stopped. At this time one submarine was lying right under the port quarter.

The crew left in the port and starboard lifeboats, two men remaining on board to lower away. While they were trying to get the two men off, the submarine fired a torpedo, which passed under the partly lowered boat and struck the ship abreast of the engine-room. One man (W. A. Belanger, a boatswain who hailed from Michigan, U.S.A.) was blown to pieces by the force of the explosion. Jack Hetherington, of Gillingham, Kent, a boy of only seventeen years, was also killed and fell into the water. There was no excuse for this cowardly act. There was not a ship in sight, and

the enemy, with perfect safety, could have allowed the crew a few more minutes' grace to abandon their vessel. The submarine was only two hundred yards away when the torpedo was fired and the impact was tremendous. There was no doubt as to the nature of the weapon which caused this explosion, for the wake of a torpedo was seen by the crew. During this unprovoked attack on an unarmed ship, in which one of the two men killed was a neutral citizen, the second submarine was keeping a good look-out for the British patrols.

It must be realised that at the time of the attack the *Van Stirum* was in large open waters; and, although no patrol vessel was in sight, it was not long after the wireless message that a trawler, also

fitted with wireless, hove in sight, steaming at her utmost speed, and followed by her consorts. The *Van Stirum* never received the answering call to her S.O.S. (her aerials having been shot away), but a reply, "Coming full speed to your assistance," was sent to her by the patrols cruising in the vicinity. The submarines had begun to retire, but the torpedo had failed to sink the *Van Stirum*, and one of them hastily returned and fired five shells into her. The explosions and the rapid interchange of wireless communication between the trawlers and other craft also brought up three British destroyers at high speed, but by this time both submarines had submerged and bolted.

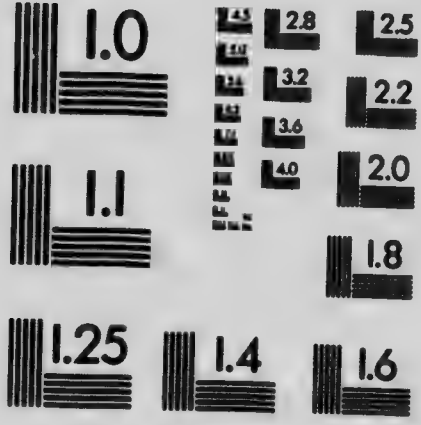
A Belgian fishing trawler picked up

the survivors shortly after they had been set adrift. She had heard the firing, and, although she was fishing at the time with her trawl down, she immediately hauled it in, and, hoisting the Belgian colours, proceeded with the utmost despatch towards the sound of the firing. The Belgian skipper did not heed the possibility that he, too, in turn might be destroyed (for he was entirely unarmed), but was prompted by the desire to save life. The crew were all transferred to his vessel and brought into port.

The approach of the patrols had undoubtedly prevented the enemy from finishing off their prey; for eighteen hours afterwards, the *Van Stirum*, still afloat, was observed by a patrol vessel. She had a heavy list to starboard. Her

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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boats' falls were hanging outboard, all boats had been washed away, and she was waterlogged. It seemed impossible that she could have lived in the weather then prevailing, which had grown suddenly worse and developed into a gale during the night. This bad weather continued for days afterwards and reached its height on the twenty-seventh of December, when the vessels on patrol suffered very severe damage. The force of this gale can be imagined from the fact that more than sixty patrol vessels were badly damaged, while two were lost with all hands. Always on watch, ready at all times to render protection to peaceful merchantmen sailing the high seas, and to attack the enemy at sight, these small craft have kept the sea in calm and

storm and shown their supreme value as a fighting unit of the British Navy. During this gale an incredible number of ships were lost, and the loss of life was appalling. Vessels were cast high and dry on the shore a considerable distance inland. Others were hurled and smashed on the rocks.

The story of the attempt to save the *Van Stirum* and bring her into port is characteristic of the pluck and endurance of the auxiliary crews. On the morning of the twenty-sixth of December, one of the patrol vessels which had discovered the *Van Stirum* lowered a boat with four hands, in order to pass a hawser on board and tow her into port. The undertaking was fraught with the greatest danger. Enormous seas were breaking

over the vessel, and she was lurching heavily. Nothing daunted, these four men pulled to the derelict and clambered on board. No sooner had the last man hauled himself up on one of the swinging boats' falls than their little boat was smashed to pieces against the ship's side and immediately sank. A wild picture met their gaze when they were able to look round. The vessel had been torpedoed abreast of the engine-room. The engines had been blown by the force of the explosion to the starboard side of the vessel. Engine-room and stokeholds were full of water. The chart office on the bridge was then explored. Here everything was found intact—a strange contrast with the desolation outside. There was a chart on the table marked off to a

position at which the vessel should have arrived at noon on the previous day. A still stranger sight met them on entering the saloon. The tables had all been laid for the Christmas dinner.

The little party of four then set to work in earnest and successfully passed a 5-in. hawser from the port bow to the attendant trawler; but, as the derelict's steering gear had been jammed, she became uncontrollable. Another trawler then closed on the derelict and successfully managed to take a wire and keep her in position while the first trawler towed. The wire soon parted and another effort —again unsuccessful—was made to take a rope from the port quarter. This manœuvre was carried out with great skill, as the trawler had to pass very close

to receive her rope. Another trawler closed in, and took a second rope from forward, and towing was again recommenced with one vessel steering.

The day wore on. Wires and ropes frequently parted; but each time the difficulty was overcome by sheer persistency; and each time new lines were passed to and fro. The afternoon faded, and darkness began to shroud the waters. It was an inky night. The wind freshened and continued to blow with ever-increasing violence. The skies seemed to open. Rainstorms lashed across the decks; and lines of foam, discovered by the flickering lights of the patrol vessels as the waves topped their bulwarks, threatened to engulf both the derelict and those trying to save her. They

made very little headway, but steadily plugged on towards a haven where they hoped to be able to beach their prize. The day dawned, revealing the derelict in very serious straits. The situation was practically hopeless. The seas ran mountains high, and it looked as if she would sink at any minute.

At 6.30 a.m. on the twenty-seventh of December the derelict broke adrift from the last wire that held her. It was now impossible to communicate. Seas broke over her from end to end. She began to lurch very heavily, and gave one the impression that her last moments had come. Meanwhile the gallant little four remained at their posts on board. The Trawler Leader warned all vessels to clear, and then steamed right up alongside. In doing so she struck her quarter

against the counter of the derelict and started rivets and plates. The Lieutenant in charge had decided that whatever happened he would save the four men who were on board. After clearing his vessel he again closed. His remaining boat was then launched, and a heaving line thrown on board the sinking ship. No sooner had the boat been hauled alongside than the *Van Stirum* suddenly rolled over to starboard and went down by the head. Her stem struck the bottom, and she remained for fully a minute with her stern in the air before falling over and disappearing. The four men managed to slide down the ship's side just in time, cut the boat adrift, and push clear. In doing so the boat was nearly swamped. The trawler again closed and

just managed to rescue them; but the boat was swept away from her side and lost.

Throughout this terrific gale of the twenty-seventh of December the patrol vessels remained on their beat and only returned to port to revictual and repair at the authorised hour on the twenty-ninth of December. They were off to sea again two days later. It is upon such men—not upon modern machinery—that sea-power, in the last resort, depends; and the sea-power of the Island Empire rests secure in her possession of a vast sea-going brood, which to-day, as in the days of the Armada, does business, from childhood to old age, in great waters. Nor have they forgotten to see the ancient works and wonders in the deep. Many of them are quiet, God-fearing men, with

a Bible in their kit, who have a fist of iron for the face of the wicked. Battle transfigures them. Occasionally—in any stir that breaks the monotony of their days and nights—one catches a glimpse of what that transfiguration must be. As our patrol boat stole into port at dusk we passed a vessel moving ready to sail. There were men on her deck who walked and looked like panthers. There was an indescribable smouldering in their eyes, a deep fire, which may be seen even in the pictures of the boy Jack Cornwell, the young hero of the Jutland Battle. In repose it has a touch of sulkiness; but it is the sulkiness of thunder and deep waters; and its secret abides with those who have looked, from birth, into the eyes of their inscrutable mother, the sea.

VI. PERISCOPES AND ROSES

VI

PERISCOPES AND ROSES

STRANGER tasks than any told here they have had to fulfil. They helped to crush the Irish rebellion, that bitter blow at Freedom. When Germany and the rebels were trying to link hands across a certain Irish river, a light was placed on the bridge. Drifters, with sand-bags round their bulwarks, trained their guns upon it all night; and that evil marriage, which the blood of Belgium, and of Freedom herself, could not prevent, received its first signal of dissolution from the little ships of our fisher folk.

Never did fishing craft make so many strange signals as did our trawlers during

those tragic nights. The story would fill a volume in itself; but of one thing we may be certain—that if St. Peter had returned to earth then, he would have found his companions where he found them of old, in fishing boats, guarding his own gates against the destroyers of Christendom.

More than one straight sea fight, a ding-dong battle, gun answering gun, has been fought between these trawlers and their elaborately equipped enemy. But all the traditions of these fishermen are those of life-saving, not destruction. Taken all in all, they are the very salt of our sea-going population. They are the men who, for generations, have manned our lifeboats all round the coast, and faced, in cold blood, the deadliest perils of storm and

darkness to save the lives of others. They endure the hardships of the sea to a great age very often. One sturdy old man of eighty, with snow-white hair and beard, was rescued recently from a boat that had been wrecked, on a mid-winter night of howling tempest and driving sleet. He was asked if he wanted ever to go to sea again, and he replied: "I go for the benefit of my health." Asked whether he did not suffer from the cold during his long exposure on the wreck (exposure which had caused the death of another seaman), he said: "Well, my hands were numbed, but I had my sea-boots full of water, and this helped to keep my feet warm." His questioner laughed, and he went on in serious explanation: "I mean it. I'm not joking.

I've always found that sea-water in my boots keeps the feet warmer than rain or fresh water do." And it may be added that he was telling the truth; for in bitterly cold weather the crews often dip their gloves in sea-water, and use the wet gloves to prevent their hands from getting frost-bitten.

It is difficult for them to forget their traditions of life-saving, though they look upon the German as a "treacherous" enemy. "Treacherous" was their final judgment, and I put more reliance on it than on more elaborately educated decisions; for they are very simple and very good folk, and they speak of their own experiences, not of the war in Europe. But more than once they have risked their own lives to save an enemy. One man

leapt from a trawler to save a German, after the "U" boat had been sunk; he was only rescued with great difficulty, and he was permanently injured by his exploit.

But, after all, their chief function even to-day is in the nature of life-saving. They have saved, in the aggregate, hundreds of thousands of lives, and destroyed a very few hundred. I realised this from the last glimpse that I caught of the multitudinous activities of our auxiliary fleet—a glimpse which helps one to co-ordinate the meanings of their splendid epic. It was during a Channel crossing, a few weeks later, on one of our troopships. There was hardly standing room on any of the decks, and the spectacle was a very strange one; for all the crowded ranks in khaki, officers and men,

had been ordered to wear lifebelts. I had seen them worn before; but never, except on the smaller scale of the lifeboat, with this curiously stirring uniformity. On one side of us a destroyer was ploughing through white mounds of foam; and, overhead, there was one of the new silver-skinned scouting airships.

Away to the east a great line of transports was returning home with the wounded, and the horizon was one long stream of black smoke. The sunset light was fading, and the seas had that peculiar iridescent smoothness as of a delicately tinted skin of very faintly burning oils, which they so often wear when the wind falls at evening. The white cliffs of England wore a spiritual aspect that only the hour and its grave significance could

lend them; and I heard a Canadian say, under his breath, to another beside him: "England has never looked so beautiful!"

There were other troopships, all crowded, about to follow us, and their cheers came faintly across the water. The throb of the engines carried us away from them rhythmically, and, somewhere on the lower deck, a mouth-organ began playing, almost inaudibly, *It's a long, long way to Tipperary.* Curiously, unconsciously, it suggested the nobler truth about Ireland. Germany thought she could take a short cut to that wild heart; but, if England even now has failed to reach it, we may be well assured that there is no royal road to it for the regiments of the Kaiser. The long, long way it is to Tipperary was well illustrated for me by a neutral friend who

saw an Irish girl knitting a scarf in the early stages of the war.

"Is that for the soldiers?" he asked.

"Yes; it's for the British," she replied.

"But you're Irish. Aren't you a Home Ruler?"

"I am that," she said; "and little did I think, six weeks ago, that I'd be knitting for the dirty assassins." But her deft needles went on knitting, and they will continue, despite all the efforts of the Kaiser to unravel her work.

"*It's a long, long way . . .*" the troops were humming the tune, too softly for it to be called singing, and it all blended with the swish of the water and the hum of the engine-room, like a memory of other voices, lost in France and Flanders. I looked down at the faces. They, too,

were grave and beautiful with evening light; and the brave, unquestioning simplicity of it all was inexpressibly noble. We talk of art; but I know that, for a few moments, no pipes among the mists of glen or mountain, no instrument on earth ever had the beauty of that faint music. It was one of those unheard melodies that are better than any heard. The sea bore the burden. The winds breathed it in undertone; and its message was one of a peace so strange that no words can describe it. Perhaps, under and above all the tragedies of the hour, the kingdom of heaven was there.

The cliffs became ghostly in the distance, and suddenly on the dusky waters behind us there shone a great misty star. It was the first flash of one of the shore

searchlights. We saw it flashing long after we had lost sight of the English coast. Then we lost that also; and the transport was left, with the dark destroyer, to find its way, through whatever perils there might be, to the French coast. Millions of men —I had read it—have been transported, despite mines and submarines, without the loss of a single life. How was it possible in the face of a foe so desperate, I wondered. Then I saw the answer.

A little black ship loomed up ahead of us and flashed a signal to our escort. Far through the dusk I saw them, little black ships of a shape that I knew, signalling all that human courage could discover of friend or foe on the face of the waters or under them. The safety of our armies, in fact, from such weapons as might

destroy thousands of men at a single blow, is very largely due to *Lizzie* and *Maggie*, those industrious little ladies of the sea, who sweep their path before them.

It might have been possible for the Navy alone to protect our transports, but the terrible fact is that we have to protect our wounded also. The proof is that we actually do it, and we cannot afford to do gigantically unnecessary things in war time. There was once a ship called the *Sussex*; but that, I believe, was explained to the satisfaction of Christendom, and—in any case—the waves conceal her dead. Let it be remembered that the cessation of this kind of warfare could only be explained to the satisfaction of Germany by the very plain

hint of her Chancellor that it had failed. In other words, *Lizzie* and *Maggie* and the *Shepherd Boy* have crushed it, and are continuing—in their thousands—to hunt it and crush it and abolish it.

But the aspect of the whole matter which it seems most desirable to emphasise is just that aspect which has been overlooked by neutrals on almost every side of this world-war. When no immediate sensational food has been provided, it might be supposed that rational folk would at least consider two possibilities: (*a*) That operations on a great scale, together with the creation of trained hosts and elaborate equipment, require a vast amount of quiet work in order to secure success. Anyone, of course, even the Crown Prince, can make a holocaust.

(*b*) That it is sometimes necessary to conceal, with the greatest care, every single fact that might help to answer so easy a question as "What is England Doing?" or "When is England Going to Wake Up?"

Yet, if there be any capable of imagining the mass on, from the one or two dry bones here given, it must occur them that the work of organising and directing the operations of even the "Auxiliary Fleet" is a gigantic one, and that this is nevertheless only a very small part indeed in relation to the work of the Fleet itself.

At each auxiliary base there are offices, or "Strafe Houses," manned by officers of the Royal Navy, who control and direct, and are in constant touch with all that is happening in all our seas. They have

mapped out all our waters, on which the movements of all reported submarines are recorded and followed up. More than a little disconcerting it would be to our enemies to look at one of these great maps, whereon not only the spots at which submarines have been sighted are neatly marked, but also the exact courses which they have taken, with all their wanderings, for hundreds of miles, traced in thin red lines, till the moment when the signal is given by telephone and wireless for the guns and nets to close in.

It is not always mere office-work in these Strafe Houses; for one of them had been ventilated by a well-aimed shell from a German battleship in a hurry. The only result, however, was the pleasure taken by the occupants in the fact that

the Royal Standard which covered one of the perforated walls had thus been turned into a shot-rent trophy. But sensationalism is of little account in the Strafe House; and the headline is reduced there to the very smallest type. While I was listening to terse tales of the recent bombardment there was a dull explosion far out at sea. The telephone immediately began to make inquiries, and, a little later, the news came that one of our trawlers had been lost with all hands. Faces were grave; but there were only three or four remarks on the subject in the Strafe House. The first was: "Traffic must be held up." The second was: "Her skipper was a good chap." The third was: "She must be replaced by trawler number so and so; not the

Stormy Petrel, she had a long spell last week."

And those three remarks sum up the sailors' attitude towards this warfare. Duty, sober realisation of the hard facts, and care for the men. From first to last, despite the ironical name of the office, I encountered none of that mere desire to kill Germans with which our seamen have been credited. They dislike the job, and regard it as a harsh interruption of their proper work—the catching of fish. But they recognise, grimly, its necessity. From first to last, through all ranks, they are simply doing their duty. There is regret sometimes when they learn that a submarine has been destroyed and they are unable to get "the scalp" in the form of evidence that will be accepted by the

Admiralty. But the symbol of the whole work that they are doing was provided by the beautifully polished brass periscope of a German submarine which I saw in the room of the Senior Naval Officer. It had been turned into a flower-stand, and carried a crown of English roses. Beauty and civilisation sometimes do get forward, even on the top of a German periscope.

VII THE "LUSITANIA" WAITS

VII

THE "LUSITANIA" WAITS

On a stormy winter's night three skippers —averaging three score years and five— were discussing the news, around a roaring fire, in the parlour of the White Horse inn. Five years ago they had retired, each on a snug little pile. They were looking forward to a mellow old age in port and a long succession of evenings at the White Horse, where they gathered to debate the politics of their district. The war had given them new topics; but Captain John Kendrick—who had become a parish councillor and sometimes carried bulky blue documents in his breast-pocket, displaying the edges with careful pride—

still kept the local pot a-boiling. He was mainly successful on Saturday nights, when the *Gazette*, their weekly newspaper, appeared. It was edited by a Scot named Macpherson, who had learned his job on the *Arbroath Free Press*.

"Macpherson will never be on the council now," said Captain Kendrick. "There's a rumour that he's a freethinker. He says that Christianity has been proved a failure by the war."

"Well, these chaps of ours now," said Captain Davidson, "out at sea on a night like this, trying to kill Germans. It's necessary, I know, because the Germans would kill our own folks if we gave 'em a chance. But don't it prove that there's no use for Christianity? In modern civilisation, I mean."

"Macpherson's no freethinker," said Captain Morgan, who was a friend of the editor, and inclined on the strength of it to occupy the intellectual chair at the White Horse. "Macpherson says we'll have to try again after the war, or it will be blood and iron all round."

"He's upset by the war," said Captain Davidson, "and he's taken to writing poytry in his paper. He'd best be careful, or he'll lose his circulation."

"Ah!" said Kendrick, "that's what 'ull finish him for the council. What we want is practical men. Poytry would destroy any man's reputation. There was a great deal of talk caused by his last one, about our trawler chaps. 'Fishers of Men,' he called it; and I'm not sure that

it wouldn't be considered blasphemious by a good many."

Captain Morgan shook his head. "Every Sunday evening," he said, "my missus asks me to read her Macpherson's pome in the *Gazette*, and I've come to enjoy them myself. Now, what does he say in 'Fishers of Men'?"

"Read it," said Kendrick, picking the *Gazette* from the litter of newspapers on the table and handing it to Morgan. "If you know how to read poytry, read it aloud, the way you do to your missus. I can't make head or tail of poytry myself; but it looks blasphemious to me."

Captain Morgan wiped his big spectacles, while the other two settled themselves to listen critically. Then he began in his best

Sunday voice, very slowly, but by no means unimpressively :

Long, long ago He said,
He who could wake the dead,
And walk upon the sea—
"*Come, follow Me.*

"Leave your brown nets and bring
Only your hearts to sing,
Only your souls to pray,
Rise, come away.

"Shake out your spirit-sails,
And brave those wilder gales,
And I will make you then
Fishers of men."

Was this, then, what He meant ?
Was this His high intent,
After two thousand years
Of blood and tears ?

God help us, if we fight
For right and not for might.
God help us if we seek
To shield the weak.

Then, though His heaven be far
From this blind welter of war,
He'll bless us on the sea
From Calvary.

"It seems to rhyme all right," said Kendrick. "It's not so bad for Macpherson."

"Have you heard," said Davidson reflectively, "they're wanting more trawler skippers down at the base?"

"I've been fifty years, man and boy, at sea," said Captain Morgan; "that's half a century, mind you."

"Ah, it's hard on the women, too," said Davidson. "We're never sure what boats have been lost till we see the women crying. I don't know how they get the men to do it."

Captain John Kendrick stabbed viciously

with his forefinger at a picture in an illustrated paper.

"Here's a wicked thing now," he said. "Here's a medal they've struck in Germany to commemorate the sinking of the *Lusitania*. Here's a photograph of both sides of it. On one side, you see the great ship sinking, loaded up with munitions which wasn't there; but not a sign of the women and children that *was* there. On the other side you see the passengers taking their tickets from Death in the New York booking office. Now that's a fearful thing. I can understand 'em making a mistake, but I can't understand 'em wanting to strike a medal for it."

"Not much mistake about the *Lusitania*," growled Captain Davidson.

"No, indeed. That was only my argy-

ment," replied the councillor. "They're treacherous lot. It was a fearful thing to do a deed like that. My son's in the Cunard; and, man alive, he tells me it's like sinking a big London hotel. There was ladies in evening dress, and dancing in the big saloons every night; and lifts to take you from one deck to another; and shops with plate-glass windows, and smoking-rooms; and glass around the promenade deck, so that the little children could play there in bad weather, and the ladies lay in their deck-chairs and sun themselves like peaches. There wasn't a soldier aboard, and some of the women was bringing their babies to see their Canadian daddies in England for the first time. Why, man, it was like sinking a nursing home!"

"Do you suppose, Captain Kendrick, that they ever caught that submarine?" asked Captain Morgan. They were old friends, but always punctilious about their titles.

"Ah, now I'll tell you something! Hear that?"

The three old men listened. Through the gusts of wind that battered the White Horse they heard the sound of heavy floundering footsteps passing down the cobbled street, and a hoarse broken voice bellowing with uncanny abandonment a fragment of a hymn:

> While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
> All seated on the ground.

"That's poor old Jim Hunt," said Captain Morgan. He rose and drew the

thick red curtains from the window to peer out into the blackness.

"Turn the lamp down," said the councillor, "or we'll be arrested under the anti-aircraft laws."

Davidson turned the lamp down and they all looked out of the window. They saw the figure of a man, black against the glimmering water of the harbour below. He walked with a curious floundering gait that might be mistaken for the effects of drink. He waved his arms over his head like a windmill and bellowed his hymn as he went, though the words were now indistinguishable from the tumult of wind and sea.

Captain Morgan drew the curtains, and the three sat down again by the fire without turning up the lamp. The firelight

played on the furrowed and bronzed old faces and revealed them as worthy models for a Rembrandt.

"Poor old Jimmy Hunt!" said Captain Kendrick. "You never know how craziness is going to take people. Jimmy was a terror for women and the drink, till he was taken off the *Albatross* by that German submarine. They cracked him over the head with an iron bolt, down at the bottom of the sea, because he wouldn't answer questions. He hasn't touched a drop since. All he does is to walk about in bad weather, singing hymns against the wind. But there's more in it than that."

Captain Kendrick lighted his pipe thoughtfully. The wind rattled the windows. Outside, the sign-board creaked and whined as it swung.

"A man like Jim Hunt doesn't go crazy," he continued, "through spending a night in a 'U' boat, and then floating about for a bit. Jimmy won't talk about it now; won't do nothing but sing that blasted hymn; but this is what he said to me when they first brought him ashore. They said he was raving mad, on account of his experiences. But that don't explain what his experiences *were*. Follow me? And this is what he said. '*I been down*,' he says, half singing like, '*I been down, down, down, in the bloody submarine that sank the Lusitania. And what's more*,' he says, '*I seen 'em!*'

"'Seen what?' I says, humouring him like, and I gave him a cigarette. We were sitting close together in his mother's kitchen. 'Ah!' he says, calming down

a little, and speaking right into my ear, as if it was a secret. 'It was Christmas Eve the time they took me down. We could hear 'em singing carols on shore; and the captain didn't like it, so he rang a little bell, and the Germans jumped to close the hatchways; and we went down, down, down, to the bottom of the sea.

"'I saw the whole ship,' he says; and he described it to me, so that I knew he wasn't raving then. 'There was only just room to stand upright,' he says, 'and overhead there was a track for the torpedo-carrier. The crew slept in hammocks and berths along the wall; but there wasn't room for more than half to sleep at the same time. They took me through a little foot-hole, with an air-tight door, into a cabin.

"'The captain seemed kind of excited, and showed me the medal he got for sinking the *Lusitania;* and I asked him if the Kaiser gave it to him for a Christmas present. That was when he and another officer seemed to go mad; and the officer gave me a blow on the head with a piece of iron.

"'They say I'm crazy,' he says, 'but it was the men on the "U" boat that went crazy. I was lying where I fell, with the blood running down my face, but I was watching them,' he says, 'and I saw them start and listen like trapped weasels. At first I thought the trawlers had got 'em in a net. Then I heard a funny little tapping sound all round the hull of the submarine, like little soft hands it was, tapping, tapping, tapping.

"'The captain went white as a ghost, and shouted out something in German, like as if he was calling "*Who's there?*" and the mate clapped his hand over his mouth, and they both stood staring at one another.

"'Then there was a sound like a thin little voice, outside the ship, mark you, and sixty fathom deep, saying, "*Christmas Eve, the waits, sir!*" The captain tore the mate's hand away and shouted again, like he was asking "*Who's there?*" and wild to get an answer, too. Then, very thin and clear, the little voice came a second time, "*The waits, sir. The Lusitania ladies!*" And at that the captain struck the mate in the face with his clenched fist. He had the medal in it still between his fingers, using it like a knuckle-duster.

Then he called to the men like a madman, all in German, but I knew he was telling 'em to rise to the surface, by the way they were trying to obey him.

"'The submarine never budged for all that they could do; and while they were running up and down and squealing out to one another, there was a kind of low sweet sound all round the hull, like a thousand voices all singing together in the sea:

Fear not, said he, for mighty dread
Had seized their troubled mind,
Glad tidings of great joy I bring
To you and all mankind.

"'Then the tapping began again, but it was much louder now; and it seemed as if hundreds of drowned hands were feeling over the hull and loosening bolts and pulling at hatchways; and—all at

once—a trickle of water came splashing down into the cabin. The captain dropped his medal. It rolled up to my hand and I saw there was blood on it. He screamed at the men, and they pulled out their life-saving apparatus, a kind of air-tank which they strapped on their backs, with tubes to rubber masks for clapping over their mouths and noses. I watched 'em doing it, and managed to do the same. They were too busy to take any notice of me. Then they pulled a lever and tumbled out through a hole, and I followed 'em blindly. Something grabbed me when I got outside and held me for a minute. Then I saw 'em, Captain Kendrick, I saw 'em, hundreds and hundreds of 'em, in a shiny light, and sixty fathom down under the dark sea—they were all waiting there, men and women

and poor little babies with hair like sunshine. . . .

"'And the men were smiling at the Germans in a friendly way, and unstrapping the air-tanks from their backs, and saying, "Won't you come and join us? It's Christmas Eve, you know."

"'Then whatever it was that held me let me go, and I shot up and knew nothing till I found myself in Jack Simmonds's drifter, and they told me I was crazy.'"

Captain Kendrick filled his pipe. A great gust struck the old inn again and again till all the timbers trembled. The floundering step passed once more, and the hoarse voice bellowed away in the darkness against the bellowing sea:

A Saviour which is Christ the Lord,
And this shall be the sign.

Captain Davidson was the first to speak. "Poor old Jim Hunt!" he said. "There's not much Christ about any of this war."

"I'm not so sure of that neither," said Captain Morgan. "Macpherson said a striking thing to me the other day. 'Seems to me,' he says, 'there's a good many nowadays that are touching the iron nails.'"

He rose and drew the curtains from the window again.

"The sea's rattling hollow," he said; "there'll be rain before morning."

"Well, I must be going," said Captain Davidson. "I want to see the naval secretary down at the base."

"About what?"

"Why, I'm not too old for a trawler, am I?"

"My missus won't like it, but I'll come with you," said Captain Morgan; and they went through the door together, lowering their heads against the wind.

"Hold on! I'm coming, too," said Captain Kendrick; and he followed them, buttoning up his coat.

WIRELESS.

Now to those who search the deep,
  Gleam of Hope and *Kindly Light*,
Once, before you turn to sleep,
  Breathe a message through the night.
Never doubt that they'll receive it.
Send it, once, and you'll believe it.

Wrecks that burn against the stars,
  Decks where death is wallowing green,
Snare the breath among their spars,
  Hear the flickering threads between,
Quick, through all the storms that blind them,
Quick with worlds that rush to find them.

Think you these aërial wires
  Whisper more than spirits may?
Think you that our strong desires
  Touch no distance when we pray?
Think you that no wings are flying
'Twixt the living and the dying?

Inland, here, upon your knees,
  You shall breathe from urgent lips,
Round the ships that guard your seas,
  Fleet on fleet of angel ships;
Yea, the guarded may so bless them
That no terrors can distress them.

You shall guide the darkling prow,
  Kneeling thus—and far inland—
You shall touch the storm-beat brow
  Gently as a spirit-hand.
Even a blindfold prayer may speed them,
And a little child may lead them.

VIII. THE SKELETON FOREST

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THE SKELETON FOREST

To-day I heard the unending rattle and roar of the machine-guns that are defeating Germany, but there were no bullets apparent and no casualties. It was the sound of the pneumatic riveting hammers, ringing upon a hundred ships in the forest-like yards of the Clyde. The scene from the deck of our launch, as we glided from dock to dock and from reach to gleaming reach of the smoke-wreathed river, was one of epic grandeur. And here, too, I was strangely reminded of the boyhood of Drake, when he was taken by his father to live on that disused hulk, rotting in Chatham Reach, to dream his dreams

and grow up in a grim nursery, among ropes and masts and cannon :

> And all round them, as he heard,
> The clang and clatter of shipwright hammers rang,
> And hour by hour upon his vision rose
> In solid oak reality, new ships,
> As Ilion rose to music, ships of war,
> The visible shapes and symbols of his dream,
> Unconscious yet, but growing as they grew,
> A wondrous incarnation, hour by hour,
> Till with their towering masts they stood complete
> Embodied thoughts, in God's own dockyards built,
> For Drake ere long to lead against the world.

It was ten years ago that the lines were written ; but the new experience brought them back to me. As I watched these great new ships arising, and saw an old instinctive experience there before me, like a recollection of a former existence, I could not help wondering whether more thoughts were in the air for me then than I knew.

Here, like the ribs of an unimaginably huge leviathan, lay the shipway in which the *Lusitania* was born, and all around it were the stark Spartan cradles of her avengers. Mile after mile they stretched, like a skeleton forest. Men moved like ants among their naked boughs. Dark bulks, embryo battleships, grew and took shape below them, among those gigantic wooden ribs. The hammers rattled and roared in a deafening crescendo that drowned all speech. They rang and palpitated and boomed together, through all the smoky day, from dawn to sunset, and through all the furnaced night, from sunset to dawn.

Here, at last, I heard the answer of the British Empire to Germany—in that unceasing sound as of rapid-firing guns.

Here were hammers engaged in something too mighty to be anything less than conclusive. Is England slow at the up-take? Yes—but the reason was evident here. If she is to exercise her might, it means the diversion or unleashing of half the energies of the human race. Howbeit, the word had been spoken, and the terrible process was obviously well on the way. The driving power behind all these pounding hammers and revolving wheels and swinging cranes was nothing less than the whole united power of the British Empire from India to Africa, and from Canada to New Zealand. No power on earth could stop it now. There was an impersonal planetary movement behind the process, which meant simply one thing—the defeat of Germany.

We lost eight destroyers in the Jutland battle. Our shipyards in that same week launched fifteen new destroyers. And, what is more, I saw brood after brood of ships, in yard after yard, ready to follow. No sooner was one ship launched than another was laid down.

Great Britain is an island, a simple fact, but not fully understood in the Middle West of a continent like North America. If Britain lost control of the sea, she would starve in six weeks. And she is taking no risks—none at all. If she lost half her Fleet to-morrow, she would still have as large a fleet as that with which she began the war, and more, many more, ships to follow. There never was building like this in the history of the world. The British do not use the word "colossal," but, if

Germany is fond of the word, here is a subject to which she may apply it.

I saw, nearing completion in this one cradle of ships, a fleet of destroyers, a fleet of submarines, a fleet of battle-cruisers, that in themselves would have constituted a formidable navy for any country. Here, too, were ships of a new type, round which special screens had been built to guard them from too inquisitive eyes. If mere size be a quality of the "colossal," I saw several submarines larger than any hitherto built; battle-cruisers, too, that would outstrip any ship in the world, and were considerably larger than any battleships in existence.

These battle-cruisers already carried their armament, and I knew not which were the more impressive, the great

muzzles of the gigantic guns that looked as if they could shatter a world, or the giant chimney-shafts in the background, that looked like cannon, up-mouthed to the skies, with the smoke of their last discharge curling about their black lips, while two sentinel aeroplanes slowly circled above.

And here, again, as in every branch of this world-war, these things implied almost unimaginable preliminaries. In a dozen mile-wide workshops surrounding the ship-yards I saw thousands of workers, men and women, wrestling, in a veritable fire of devotion, with a thousand labours of Hercules. Here the gigantic propellers were being shaped and polished, with the passion of the sculptor, to their exquisite curves. Here the thousand tiny blades

of the turbine rotors were each fixed, separately, at its right angle, with the minute care of the watchmaker.

The newspapers have talked much of the labour troubles on the Clyde, for the simple reason that one man in a city who throws his chair through a restaurant window will be more widely advertised than the three million who merely use their chairs in the ordinary way. But I happened to visit the Clyde at the time of the brief annual holiday which the workers had been asked to forgo, and I saw for myself how they were refuting the libel upon them. All these thousands were working and sweating as if their lives depended on the achievement of each minute.

And let nobody think that the abandonment of their brief holiday was a small

sacrifice on the part of these "sheltered" workers. Nobody who has been through those grinding workshops will ever again think that. In the munition works, a short distance away, hundreds of women were heaving great shells into the shaping machines, or drawing red-hot copper bands from furnaces; and there was a steady fervour about their work, hour after hour, that seemed as if it would exhaust any human energy. They seemed to lavish all the passion of motherhood upon their work; for this gleaming brood of shells, rank after rank, had indeed been brought forth to shield a dearer brood of flesh and blood. "Mothers of the Army" was the thought that came to one's mind, though they were of all ages. An army of little mothers, in the Peter Pan sense—

but the shells were their terrible brood also.

Not only shells, but many strange broods, I saw, in many strange houses round and about the Clyde. Here, in fact, were "mystery" factories. On the ground floor you would pass through the smiling faces of ladies and gentlemen decently engaged in the manufacture of Kodaks, or malted milk. On the next floor you would discover a maelstrom of energy, turning out shells; and, across a court-yard, an inner building, where—a theme for Sir James Barrie—under an advertisement of sewing machines, a hundred hands were working night and day at—aeroplanes.

All Britain is an Arabian Night of surprises and mysteries now, for those who

have eyes in their heads. Look well at that grave old city mansion, for there are all the quiet exits and entrances of a drama such as Shakespeare never knew. When a Government official begins telling you the "Tale of the Man with the White Chrysanthemum"—as happened to myself—he is only relating one of the incidents of the blockade, not a magazine story. But the drama of dramas is being played, here on the Clyde, "where the labour troubles are."

But all this work goes on, in long shifts, without ceasing, by night or day. There is neither dawn nor sunset, weekday nor Sabbath, on the Clyde now till victory comes. In all the 4,000 munition factories controlled by the British Government the same tale is told. The only moment when

work ceases is that of which they are warned by the notices hung in every department, telling them what to do in case of a raid by hostile aircraft. Then the lights go out, but there is no panic. Whenever there has been a raid the women workers have lined up and gone to their appointed places, quietly and steadily, as their brothers dressed their line for the *Birkenhead* drill. Many of them have dropped at their work, "casualties" on a roll of honour as proud as that of their brothers and sweethearts in the trenches. Many of them are disfigured by their handling of dangerous chemicals, and as they hold up their yellow arms or turn their blotched faces upon you, the tears are very near. But they triumph in it, these little mothers of the Army, for joy

that they, too, perhaps, have saved a son for Britain.

On my return journey down the Clyde I saw one very significant thing—a quite unadvertised result of the Jutland battle. For two years previously work upon merchant ships had almost been abandoned. All the energies of the shipwrights were concentrated upon the Navy. Since the Jutland battle, however, work had been resumed on merchant ships. The hammers were rattling on the sides of a dozen great liners. Cargo boats of all kinds were keeping hundreds of men busy, and unless my eyes grievously deceived me the transatlantic service would soon be considerably improved.

I wished very much that a glimpse of this curious result of the "Colossal

German Victory" and "Downfall of the British Empire," as certain headlines had it, might have been vouchsafed to the party of German burgomasters who visited the Clyde six weeks before the outbreak of war. They were entertained by our great shipbuilders, and everyt ng was shown to them. It was foolish, perhaps, but characteristic, and, after all, preferable to espionage.

After a luncheon at one of the shipyards, the chairman ventured to tell the guests one small home truth. "You have seen to-day on the Clyde," he said, "more than you would be allowed to see of your own yards in Germany."

In that one sentence resides the whole secret of this war, and the explanation of the fact that the hammers of these yards

mean business at last. Their rattle and roar will continue till the last machine-gun of Germany ceases fire. They are the hammers, not only of shipwrights, but of the builders of a better world.

IX. HEROICS AND LAUGHTER

IX

HEROICS AND LAUGHTER

It was the battle-cruiser fleet that engaged and held the enemy during the Battle of Jutland; and it was the battle-cruiser fleet that I had an opportunity of seeing, somewhere in the North. On my way to it I passed the grey castle of Edinburgh. A red-faced old soldier was still telling a crowd of tourists about the baby, "wrapped in cloth of gold," which was discovered a year or two ago, in the wall of Queen Mary's chamber. But there were wounded soldiers quartered in one part of the castle now, and a brawny Scottish regiment, with kilt and bonnet, was preparing for the front in another part. The most romantic

of cities was all astir, with history again in the making; and over the grey crosses, commemorating old battles, the "bold bugles, blowing points of war," rang from the ancient heights, and echoed all down the Canongate, to die away in the halls of Holyrood. All the colour of a thousand years of war had come back, like the life to the face of a tranced sleeper, and added a significance and a glamour to the new forms of power which I was about to see. Never did Britain seem so secure as in this fortress of a thousand memories; and the old gun that boomed the hour of one from the ramparts seemed mightier than anything that Krupp could conceive.

. . . . .

Then came the most striking contrast that I have ever experienced. A smart

crew of bluejackets brought a boat up to a quay, and very soon we were butting through grey water towards a cluster of lean, grey craft that looked—at first—as unimpressive as a lot of floating flat-irons. Only they seemed to be made of lead, soft lead; and if there be anything more lifeless, more corpse-like, than this fighting colour, I have never seen it.

But they grew as we neared them, grew till the great guns of their turrets gave significance to their superstructure. The exquisite lines became organic and separated clearly from the grey chaos of water; then, as the first great ship towered above us, massive as a fortress, sensitive as a stag to every flicker or wink of a signal in all the circle of the horizon, I read her name. The meaning of those

six letters under the brooding might of her guns, guns that could hurl a ton of metal for twenty miles, went through me like a trumpet-call. It was the *Canada*. And one of her bluejackets was talking with two flags to a ship only a quarter of a mile away, whose name was *Australia*. And a little way behind them lay the *New Zealand*. Then I began, faintly, to understand once more the sources of majesty, and the true glory of my country, in the love of her free nations. I do not know whether it was the American Revolution that taught us our lesson, but I do know that this quiet arrival of fleets and armies from the ends of the earth is a terrible answer to many propagandists. To turn away from our own intellectuals, who preach disloyalty in every department

of life, to so simple and definite an act as this is like waking from a nightmare to a spring morning. If Armageddon teaches us, once more, the sheer glory and beauty of loyalty, which is the foundation of all honour, all law, and all freedom on earth, the world will not have suffered in vain.

A few minutes later we were aboard the *Inflexible*, and I began to learn a little more about the inside of a British man-of-war. She had played her part in the Jutland battle, but showed no scars, except one small hole in a funnel, which was too small to be worth repairing, especially as it could be surrounded with a white ring and worn as a decoration. The captain explained to me that the bridge—a mere framework of canvas—had no armoured

protection, because it was quite the safest place on the ship, "for if you stand behind armour you get killed by splinters, while on the bridge, unless they get a direct hit, the shell goes clean through without hurting you." It was the most pleasant philosophy for exposed positions that could be imagined, but he omitted all the real points of comparison. A junior officer looked at him reproachfully. "Well," the captain muttered to himself, almost sheepishly, as if caught in a lie, "perhaps one can exaggerate it."

There is no race of men in the world more entirely free from every kind of affectation than the British naval officer. It is not only that they are free from every thought of "posing." They are free even from the thought that they

ought to be free of it. It has never entered their heads. They are quite ready to tell you, with a roar of laughter, how So-and-So crouched like a cat, ready to jump, with his eye cocked at the first shell that went whining over them, and how he leapt to his feet, chuckling like a schoolboy, immediately afterwards, to duck no more that day. They have no truck at all with "heroics," but blow them away with wholesome laughter. No good man runs any risk of being frozen into a smirking statue in the British Navy. I do not believe there is a sailor in the Fleet who could be caught in any single attitude that a Press photographer would think "right." The men of the *Warspite* had an admirable opportunity, and—like Shakespeare—they lost it "for a quibble."

I suppose that I must be regarded as an uncommonly black liar by any German sympathiser who reads this chapter—if any do—for his friends tell him that the *Warspite* is at the bottom of the sea, whereas I now tell him that, on leaving the *Inflexible*, I personally visited the *Warspite*, and saw her holes being patched, six weeks after the Jutland battle. She was even then ready for action again. It is true that she had been battered heavily, for she had taken on no less than eight German ships. One hole was about the size of a church window, and she had many dents. But the real damage done was not great, and the spirits of her men were very great indeed.

This is the way in which they tossed aside their crowns of heroism. In the

hottest part of the fight they had executed an extraordinary manœuvre. The *Warrior* was being very badly mauled at the time, and the *Warspite* came between her and the enemy, taking all the punishment, paying as much back as she could, and slowly revolving, like a great cat chasing its tail, all her guns coming into play in turn. The *Warrior* was saved, and everyone aboard agreed that this manœuvre of the *Warspite* was a new and a remarkable one, deserving of much gratitude. Whereupon a deputation was sent to the *Warspite* bearing gifts—boxes of cigars and sundry bottles—that would in most cases arouse enthusiasm. "Take 'em, mates. You saved us," said the grateful emissaries. "Take 'em back, you blighters!" was the reply, roared through

a gale of Homeric laughter. "Take 'em back. We didn't try to save you; we was chasing our own damned tail. 'Ow could we 'elp it? Our 'elm was jammed."

The next to loom up out of the grey mists were the *Lion* and the *Tiger*, both ready for sea at any moment, as also were other ships, reported by Berlin to be heavily damaged, but showing remarkably few traces, even when the scars were pointed out by experts. Ship after ship we passed on our way to the much-desired cruiser where lunch awaited us, and, incidentally, the best of all cocktails, in compliment to an American guest who was with the party. It was, indeed, an excellent cocktail, for, after lunch, as we watched a seaplane soaring overhead and looping the loop like a tumbler pigeon,

the American guest—a gentleman with a wife and family, too—implored that he might forthwith be taken up into the heavens for the same purpose. "And what would the Admiralty say to me if anything happened?" asked the captain. "No, sir. Send along some of the hyphenate kind, and we'll try it." Followed a yarn —the only true version—of an English aviator, captured by the Germans, who was asked by his captors to take a German observer over one of our seas in his machine. At first he refused, but afterwards, strapping himself in position, consented. The German was armed, but bulky, and his straps were not to be depended on. Somewhere over the North Sea, in the dusk of that sunset, a trawler saw a remarkable sight. An English

aviator was looping the loop, for sheer joy apparently, somersault after somersault, like a tumbler pigeon. He kept it up for half an hour. Then—this is important, for there is a centripetal force to overcome—he flew upside down for a hundred yards or so. This was quite successful. A dark bulk dropped from the machine, and splashed into the North Sea. Perhaps it was a German, with a revolver in each hand. At any rate, an English aviator arrived on the East Coast an hour or two later, and he complained of feeling lonely.

It was obvious, in talking to the officers and men of the battle-cruiser fleet, that they were brimming with satisfaction over the result of the Jutland battle. I asked them about those curious sentences in the Jellicoe report, describing a heavy

explosion, felt by all the battle-cruiser fleet simultaneously at dusk, after the enemy had withdrawn. The nearest German ship at the time was at least five miles away, and the explosion must have been a terrific one, for six of our cruisers imagined that they themselves had struck a mine. Perhaps, when "military reasons" permit, we shall have some explanation from Berlin. At present, this also is a "mystery." Our own naval officers have their views on the matter, though they have not embodied them in any official report. They are content with the ascertained German losses, which, absolutely and relatively, in the number of ships and the tonnage also, are definitely proven to be considerably greater than our own. Further than that they will not go; and

the simple reason for the German Press victory is that, no matter how great a value our officials and newspapers at home may have placed upon publicity, our men at sea never bothered their heads about it. What can be done with men like those of the *Warspite*? It is not that they feel superior to it. They are content with realities, and they simply do not care about the rest.

The Jutland battle has been described as our greatest naval victory since Trafalgar. But it is far more than that. The whole scale of our warfare has altered. At Trafalgar we lost 480 men in a fight that extended over two days. At Jutland we lost over 6,000 men in three hours. And the Germans lost far more heavily even than their losses in ships would

justify; for they had put to sea with double guns' crews, and they were overmanned. So said those who knew what they were talking about, on the British battle-cruiser fleet.

But, as for painting the newspapers red on the morrow of a grim reality like this, what can you expect of seamen who behave with complete disregard of the proprieties? In the very hottest moment of this most stupendous battle in all history, two grimy stokers' heads arose for a breath of fresh air. What domestic drama they were discussing the world may never know. But the words that were actually heard, passing between them, while the shells whined overhead, were these:

What I ses is—'e ought to 'ave married 'er.

. . . . .

What can the Press do—what can Germany do—with men so indecently unheroic?

To understand it you must go down to the grim engine-room, where the complications of machinery—if you try to think them out—will give you brain fever. Or you must go into one of the great turrets with the gun-crew—as I did—and watch them loading those monstrous machines with shells that weigh a ton and can be thrown for twenty miles. You must watch them in that narrow space, walled in with steel, so narrow that it seems impossible for flesh and blood to stand the mere concussion of the huge discharge. (In reality, it is easier on the ear-drums within than without.) There, in that narrow space of details so compact and minute that men

must sit on bicycle saddles while they are battering down an Empire, you will understand that it is as impossible for these men to be emotionally "quick on the trigger" as it would be to use one of their guns for a pocket pistol, or for the British Empire to lose its "calm" and move with the rapidity of Mexican raiders. But—this does not mean that a pocket-pistol has any superiority over a battleship, even though the battleship takes an hour and a half to get up steam. Nor does it mean that these men are insensible to the great significance of their calling. These are things of which they do not speak, because they know that speech is impotent.

And as we returned by the *Canada*, the *New Zealand*, and the *Australia*, great ships so near together, from Dominions so far

apart, and I saw the long lines stretching out on every side, all ready for action, I suddenly realised another thing—that even this was not the British Fleet.

One veil had been lifted for me when I saw those marvellous armed auxiliaries, a few score of their thousands, patrolling our coasts. Another veil had been lifted to-day on this gigantic host, which had encountered and beaten the whole might of the German navy. But there was another veil which had not yet been lifted, the veil of mist that shrouds the Grand Fleet of Britain, those "far-off storm-beaten ships," thrones of the might of the whole Empire, watching and waiting in the grey north. Then I understood why the German fleet, brave as it has proved itself, veiled its own eyes from the

splendour of the fifth act in this Titanic drama; and I understood also, once and for all, why our sailors talk of other things.

Occasionally, however, there are powers that try to speak for them, and, as we returned by a great new dock which was to be consecrated to the cause of Liberty on the following Sunday, we heard a ship's band in the distance practising the hymn for the occasion. The music floated out over the grey waters:

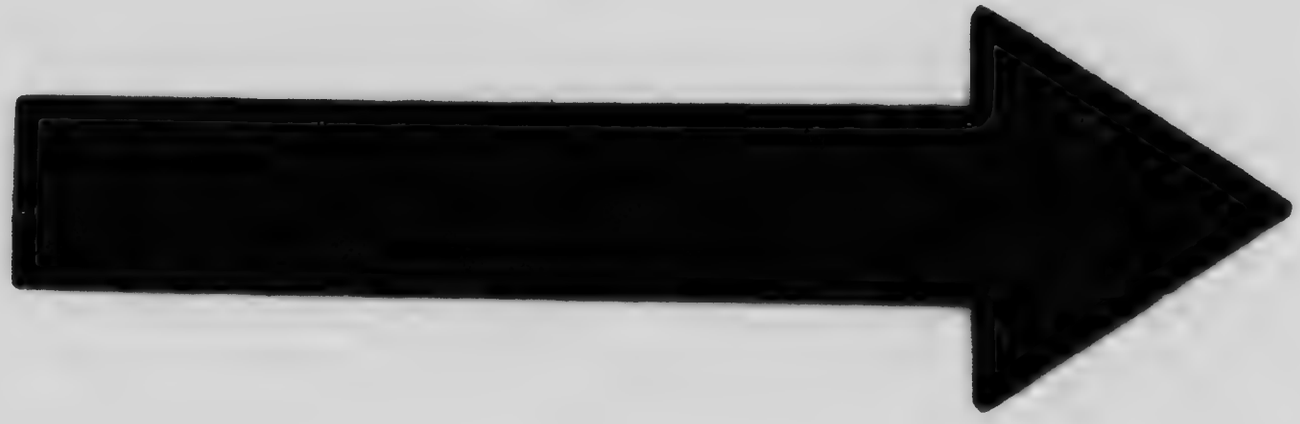
O God, our help in ages past. . . .

Men looked away from each other, and out to the ships, where the signals were flashing. *Canada* was talking to *Australia* again, and *Australia* to *New Zealand*.

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone. . . .

It was all the past of England speaking, from the days of Shakespeare; all the little grey spires and towers of her russet-roofed hamlets; all the dead of "this dear, dear land, this blessed plot, this realm, this earth, this England." The men did not sing. They have no talent in opera. They did not even speak. But I knew how they would fight.

THE ADMIRAL'S GHOST



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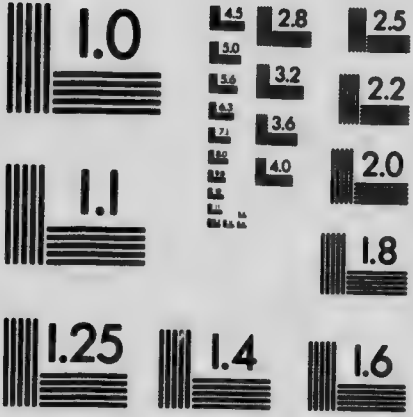

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THE ADMIRAL'S GHOST.

I tell you a tale to-night
  Which a seaman told to me,
With eyes that gleamed in the lanthorn light
  And a voice as low as the sea.

You could almost hear the stars
  Twinkling up in the sky,
And the old wind woke and moaned in the spars,
  And the same old waves went by,

Singing the same old song,
  As ages and ages ago,
While he froze my blood in that deep-sea night
  With the things that he seemed to know.

A bare foot pattered on deck.
  Ropes creaked ; then—all grew still,
And he pointed his finger straight in my face
  And growled, as a sea-dog will.

" Do 'ee know who Nelson was ?
  That pore little shrivelled form
With the patch on his eye and the pinned-up sleeve
  And the soul like a North Sea storm ?

" Ask of the Devonshire men !
They know, and they'll tell you true ;
He wasn't the pore little chawed-up chap
That Hardy thought he knew.

" He wasn't the man you think !
His patch was a dern disguise !
For he knew that they'd find him out, d'you see,
If they looked him in both his eyes.

" You've heard of sperrits, no doubt ;
Well, there's more in the matter than that.
But he wasn't the patch and he wasn't the sleeve,
And he wasn't the laced cocked-hat.

" *Nelson was just—a Ghost !*
You may laugh ! But the Devonshire men
They knew that he'd come when England called,
And they know that he'll come again.

" I'll tell you the way it was
(For none of the landsmen know),
And to tell it you right, you must go a-starn
Two hundred years or so.

. . . . .

" The waves were lapping and slapping
The same as they are to-day ;
And Drake lay dying aboard his ship
In Nombre Dios Bay.

"The scent of the foreign flowers
Came floating all around;
'But I'd give my soul for the smell o' the pitch,'
Says he, 'in Plymouth Sound.

"'What shall I do,' he says,
'When the guns begin to roar,
An' England wants me, and me not there
To shatter 'er foes once more?'

"(You've heard what he said, maybe,
But I'll mark you the p'ints again;
For I want you to box your compass right
And get my story plain.)

"'You must take my drum, he says,
'To the old sea-wall at home;
And if ever you strike that drum,' he says,
'Why strike me blind, I'll come!

"'If England needs me, dead
Or living, I'll rise that day!
I'll rise from the darkness under the sea
Ten thousand miles away.'

"That's what he said; and he died;
An' his pirates, listenin' roun',
With their crimson doublets and jewelled swords
That flashed as the sun went down,

" They sewed him up in his shroud
With a round shot top and toe.
They sank him under the salt sharp sea
Where all good seamen go.

" They sailed away in the dark
To the dear little isle they knew;
And they hung his drum by the old sea-wall
Just as he told them to.

. . . . .

" Two hundred years went by,
And the guns began to roar,
And England was fighting hard for her life,
As ever she fought of yore.

" ' It's only my dead that count,'
She said, as she says to-day;
' It isn't the ships and it isn't the guns
'Ull sweep Trafalgar's Bay.'

" D'you guess who Nelson was?
You may laugh, but it's true as true!
There was more in that pore little chawed-up chap
Than ever his best friend knew.

" The foe was creepin' close,
In the dark, to our white-cliffed isle;
They were ready to leap at England's throat,
When—O, you may smile, you may smile;

"But—ask of the Devonshire men;
For they heard in the dead of night
The roll of a drum, and they saw *him* pass
On a ship all shining white.

"He stretched out his dead cold face
And he sailed in the grand old way!
The fishes had taken an eye and an arm,
But he swept Trafalgar's Bay."

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